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Disarmament Commission

228th Meeting
Tuesday, 13 April 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Abdelaziz . . . . . (Egypt)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

General exchange of views (*continued*)

Mr. Tudela (Peru) *(spoke in Spanish)*: I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for the 1999 session. Allow me also to extend my congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

Since the end of the previous session of the Commission, events of great significance to our work have taken place. Some of these have been discouraging, such as the nuclear tests in South Asia and military actions undertaken in the absence of a specific mandate by the Security Council. However, other, relatively modest events have occurred that have moderated our pessimism. These include the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction; the proposal for the establishment of a new agenda for nuclear disarmament, which Peru fully supports; and the General Assembly resolution welcoming Mongolia's decision to declare itself a nuclear-weapon-free State. These all are very important events.

We believe it essential — in this post-cold-war era and in the wake of the profound changes that have taken place within the international system, particularly in the area of disarmament — to hold another special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. In this respect, we should seize the opportunity offered by the Assembly's decision, in an exception to the rules of the Disarmament Commission, to charge the Commission with endeavouring, for the fourth consecutive year, to elaborate an agreed programme of action and goals for that special session.

Peru considers that the document submitted by the Chairman of the Working Group in 1998 addresses the principal interests and concerns of all States, even though it does not reflect all national positions. Nevertheless, we believe that it is acceptable and does not affect the position of any delegation before the convening of the special session.

We should also consider this year the question of the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in accordance with regional agreements freely arrived at. The Peruvian delegation believes that the Commission should elaborate general principles and purposes, in line with the various regional initiatives, without making any judgments on the feasibility and effectiveness of existing zones.

Considerable progress has been achieved to date. The document submitted a few days ago by the Chairman of the Working Group provides guidelines that will allow us successfully to conclude our work.

The third item, no less important than the previous ones, refers to guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N. Peru believes that concrete measures in favour of conventional arms control and limitation could make a real contribution to reducing

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the number of conflict situations or to controlling their resurgence.

We resolutely support all measures related to the problem of small arms and light weapons. It is a fact that they represent the principal component of the majority of armed conflicts.

Peru agrees with these objectives and is taking specific measures in this regard. Peru and Ecuador, jointly and with the support of the Guarantor Countries of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol, are in the process of demining certain areas of our common border. With regard to small arms on a regional level, the adoption of the Inter-American Convention against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials represents an exceptionally important step taken by the Americas towards political and military stability. That Convention has been complemented by Peruvian legislation that establishes rules and regulations dealing with the ownership and transfer of weapons by the civilian population.

The contribution that a regional approach to disarmament can make with regard to global disarmament is now more significant than ever. Such regional efforts are made in the context of the trend towards seeking global, general and complete disarmament under effective international control. Peru therefore believes that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean can and should play an important role in disarmament.

As announced in November 1998, the Peruvian Government decided to make an annual voluntary contribution of $30,000 to cover the operating costs of that Centre. The Peruvian Government also decided to make an additional one-time contribution of $30,000 to cover the installation costs of that Centre. This contribution was made yesterday with the deposit of a check to the Trust Fund for the Regional Centre.

Peru affirms once again its permanent commitment to world peace and to respect for international law. The understanding achieved between Ecuador and Peru, which the Secretary-General of the United Nations has called a "model to be imitated" by other members of the international community, means that, for our countries, peace continues to be the most highly prized goal. Guided by our experience, we thus affirm that every conceivable effort should be made to maintain and strengthen peace. Peace is indispensable to development and political stability.

In Peru's case, significant resources that were once devoted to purchasing military equipment are now being used for social and economic development. Mechanisms of transparency and confidence-building that we have always supported, as well as the use of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, now allow our armed forces to make military purchases strictly oriented towards maintaining the level of effectiveness necessary to fulfil their constitutional duties to protect and defend our national integrity, in line with the trust that presently prevails between Peru and its neighbour countries.

Lastly, as of the year 2000, the Disarmament Commission will install a new working mechanism to handle its responsibilities in disarmament matters. This will require the firm political will of all the members of this Commission to define consensually the new topics that will be the subjects of our deliberations. We believe that the positive results that we achieve this year will enable us to enter the new millennium on a better footing. The Peruvian delegation herewith pledges its cooperation and willingness to achieve this.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission at its 1999 session. Given your experience and diplomatic skills, we are convinced that the Commission will successfully fulfil its tasks. You can fully rely on the active and comprehensive support of the Belarus delegation. I also wish to congratulate the other officers of the Commission's Bureau at this session.

Moreover, on behalf of the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Mr. Sergei Martynov, who held the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission in 1998, may I express our sincere gratitude to all delegations whose joint efforts enabled the Committee successfully to complete its work last year and to bring the international community one step nearer to its desired goal of general and global disarmament.

I also wish to express appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, for his efforts and skilful leadership of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and for the contribution of his sector of the Secretariat to effective international cooperation in the areas of the maintenance of international peace and security and disarmament.

In the course of the past decade, the international community has managed to rethink the sad experience of the arms race and to approach the third millennium with significant results in the fields of arms limitation and disarmament. The common nature of the tasks facing various regions and countries in relation to the implementation of international obligations under disarmament agreements has been bolstered in recent years by increased convergence in the positions of many States on these issues.

A special place is held in this regard by the international agreements in the area of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction and the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; and the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction demonstrate that a broader range of disarmament subjects is now under consideration in the international negotiating process.

On the agenda of the international disarmament process, we are gradually finding that there are fewer topics that are forbidden, not open to discussion or subject to objection. The signing and entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects; the signing of the Ottawa Convention; the realization of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe; and the initiation of negotiations on light and small arms represent substantial contributions to reducing the military threat.

The timing of these events itself is evidence of the fact that the disarmament process, however critical the attitudes of a number of States may have been, has become stable and progressive towards the end of the century. It is well known that Belarus has made an active and practical contribution throughout these years in all areas of the disarmament process, from conventional weapons to strategic nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, today we must note a serious undermining of the process of strengthening international and European security, the main component of which is disarmament at the regional and global levels. Currently, the aggressive action of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, taken in circumvention of the United Nations Security Council, is posing a direct threat to European and international security. We believe that such illegal and unilateral use of force will not only not promote a strengthening of confidence and stronger partnership relations on the European continent, but may also lead to a new explosion of the arms race.

The lessons of history show that peace and security cannot be achieved through the use or threat of use of force. At the very heart of peace lie partnership, cooperation, confidence-building measures and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with generally accepted principles of international law. These provisions are laid down in the United Nations Charter and Belarus actively supports them.

In the light of the tragic events in the Balkans, further efforts to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones might prove to be a way of strengthening security and confidence at the subregional and regional levels. The introduction of new initiatives to create nuclear-weapon-free zones and the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones proposed in the past, including in the Middle East, Central Asia and Mongolia, reflect the gradual progress of the international community towards a nuclear-free world and the strengthening of the international regime of nuclear non-proliferation, and contribute greatly to the enhancement of global security.

Belarus is taking practical action to try to ensure a favourable atmosphere in Central Europe for strengthening mutual understanding and confidence among Europeans into the next century. The President of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka, has proposed the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe, which would be the logical outcome of practical steps taken in the field of nuclear disarmament on the European continent. As members know, that idea has been reflected in the documents of many disarmament forums in recent years, including those of the General Assembly and the Disarmament Commission.

This initiative would seem to be one of the most effective ways of reducing tension in Europe and improving international relations as a whole, even within the context of the broadening of NATO. Within the Working Group we must now work on the final version of the document on nuclear-weapon-free zones. We

believe that the document that has already been prepared provides a good basis for work on the final recommendations and for the development of strategies for international efforts in this area. The delegation of Belarus assumes that initiatives to create nuclear-weapon-free zones on the European continent and elsewhere will be further discussed in the Disarmament Commission, and will in due course lead to the adoption of approved documents.

The fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is one of the issues on the agenda of the Commission that needs to be resolved. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus has supported the relevant General Assembly resolutions for several years, while understanding the complexity of the problems relating to the inclusion of this important issue on the agenda. The agenda of the special session should be balanced and should include the issues of nuclear and conventional weapons, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones and the problems of regional disarmament. Immediate issues are the question of strengthening international security and confidence-building measures and the role that the United Nations plays in disarmament.

As the delegation of Belarus has pointed out on several occasions, the fourth special session should focus on using the experience that has been accumulated, assessing the work that has so far been done and developing practical plans to ensure security throughout the world in the twenty-first century. The Working Group accomplished substantial work in this respect during the previous session of the Commission. Although delegations came close to consensus, the time available did not make it possible to discuss all of the aims and tasks of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. My delegation hopes that we will proceed constructively in discussing those issues during the present session of the Commission.

Among the practical problems in the area of international security and disarmament, special importance has recently been attached to the question of arms control. We believe that global stability and peace will be achieved not by increasing arms budgets but, on the contrary, by reducing them through transparency measures and joint efforts among States. In this context, the delegation of Belarus supports the preparation of a Commission document on guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament.

Experts from Belarus are taking active part in the groups established through the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 52/38 G, on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures, and 52/38 J, on small arms. We hope that the recommendations prepared by those groups will lead to the successful outcome of the Commission's work in that area. I should also like to underline the great importance, within the system of preventive strategies, of effective control over the stockpiling of and trade in weapons.

In conclusion, I should like to assure you, Mr. Chairman, of the readiness of Belarus to interact and enter into a dialogue with all delegations, with a view to the development and adoption of practical decisions and recommendations in the course of this session of the Commission.

Ms. Laker (Canada): Canada welcomes this opportunity to address important issues that affect all Members of the United Nations pertaining to non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. The Disarmament Commission, as a global deliberating forum, not only increases awareness of issues but also identifies principles and offers guidelines to facilitate achievement of its goals. This is especially important when referring to nuclear-weapon-free zones. Canada welcomes and encourages progress towards nuclear-weapon-free zones, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and internationally agreed criteria. In order to enhance regional security, nuclear-weapon-free zones must be freely arrived at among the States concerned, particularly in conflict-prone regions. The comprehensive support of the five nuclear-weapon States for those zones is essential, and we urge unconditional action by them to that end.

In support of this principle, in 1997 Canada distributed a working paper entitled "Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones: A Comparative Perspective". The document was intended to promote discussion and will, we hope, continue to add value to this year's deliberations. We were especially pleased to co-sponsor the resolution adopted during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, which was introduced by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Canada believes that this initiative is an important step towards enduring confidence and security building in the region, and we will continue to support efforts by those countries for its establishment.

With respect to the United Nations special session on disarmament, Canada continues to believe that consensus is necessary in order for such a session to have a significant impact on the international community. As we have stated in the past, it is important to remember that our efforts in the Disarmament Commission can succeed only to the extent that we, collectively, are willing to consider new perspectives in the search for common ground. While we regret that opportunities were lost during previous sessions of the Disarmament Commission, we look forward to discussing further the ways in which a special session on disarmament might further our common goals.

Consolidation of peace is an increasingly important area of interest to Canada, and we have engaged in substantive discussions in this and other forums. Canada continues to be impressed by the work of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the various consultative mechanisms that have been introduced during the reforms of the past several years. The importance of this Commission in informing the work of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and increasing awareness within the United Nations system and in regional organizations, as well as identifying principles and guidelines for achieving practical disarmament and peace-building objectives, should not be understated. We would also like to recognize the important contribution of the group of interested Member States, established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/38 G, to the ongoing work in this area.

Canada was pleased to have distributed two working papers during past sessions of the Commission: "Practical disarmament, demobilization and reintegration measures for peace-building" in 1997, and "Peace through practical disarmament measures: the context" in 1998. We look forward to continuing discussions on the principles advanced in those papers.

As Canada's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, has stated, Canada is cognizant of the need for the international community to rethink the conduct of its affairs in the new political environment. Canada is focusing, to a great extent, on human security and on the need to minimize the civilianization of conflict. The importance of human security is particularly evident when we look at recent and ongoing disarmament initiatives such as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — the Ottawa Convention — and international efforts to minimize the impact of small arms and light weapons. Efforts to strengthen and enhance the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime can only increase the security and well-being of the tens of millions of people directly threatened by the pursuit of nuclear weapons and the consequences of proliferation.

The Canadian delegation would like to assure you, Sir, of our full cooperation and will extend every effort in the course of our work to support you, your Vice-Chairmen and the Chairmen of the three Working Groups in reaching a successful outcome of these deliberations.

Mrs. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): Allow me, Sir, to associate myself with the congratulations already addressed to you on your election to the responsible post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at this session. We hope for fruitful and successful work under your wise leadership. I should also like to express gratitude to Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, for his introductory statement on the agenda items that are before the Disarmament Commission for its consideration.

Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the work of the Disarmament Commission as a forum with universal membership which affords all States Members of the United Nations the opportunity to participate in a discussion of the problems of disarmament and in drawing up concrete decisions and recommendations. The priority task in the field of disarmament remains the strengthening of the international regime for the non-proliferation of all types of weapons of mass destruction. The basis of this regime consists of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the decisions of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.

In the field of nuclear disarmament, the tasks of reducing nuclear arsenals and concluding a treaty on the prohibition of the production of fissile materials remain vital, and can be achieved only through constructive dialogue and purposeful efforts by all States.

Kazakhstan's substantial contribution to non-proliferation and to the halting of nuclear-weapons tests is universally acknowledged. Renunciation of all

forms of nuclear weapons was a natural choice for my country, which has experienced to the full the disastrous effects of the nuclear tests conducted at the former Semipalatinsk testing ground. Precisely for this reason, it is our view that further progress along the road of arms limitation and arms reduction will facilitate the strengthening of international security and stability at the regional and global levels.

As a party to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Kazakhstan believes that nuclear-weapon-free zones established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned constitute an important mechanism for the strengthening of the international non-proliferation regime. Article VII of the Treaty and the 1995 Conference decisions on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament" have laid a firm foundation for the establishment of new internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free zones which will serve to strengthen peace and security at the global and regional levels. In Kazakhstan's view, it is important for all countries that have proclaimed themselves to be part of nuclear-weapon-free zones that the nuclear Powers should assume the obligation to respect the nuclear-free status of such zones and should offer security assurances to the States participating in them.

The significance of such zones for the creation of a situation of international stability and security has been widely recognized. This is testified to by the progress achieved in this sphere through the creation of the existing zones, which today cover more than 50 per cent of the Earth's surface, including Antarctica. The existing zones serve as a good example for the creation of new zones.

Kazakhstan naturally attaches paramount importance to progress in implementing the initiative for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. At the fifty-second and fifty-third sessions of the General Assembly, together with the other States of the region, we sponsored two draft resolutions on the issue of the establishment of such a zone. We note with satisfaction the support extended by other Member States. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank the delegations in this room for the support expressed on this subject in their statements during the current discussion in the Disarmament Commission.

My delegation would further like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General and to Mr. Dhanapala for the assistance provided by the United Nations in drawing up a legal instrument on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in our region. The group of experts from the five countries of the region established with the support of the United Nations has done a large amount of work. A certain amount of progress has been made in drawing up the basic elements of the draft text of a future treaty on a Central Asian zone.

We are convinced that the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia will constitute an important step towards the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the development of cooperation in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, the development of cooperation in the environmental rehabilitation of territories suffering from radioactive contamination, the promotion of general and complete disarmament and the strengthening of regional and international peace and security. Kazakhstan will continue in the future to participate consistently and constructively in work on the establishment of a zone in Central Asia.

In today's world, particular importance attaches to careful study of the issues relating to the place and role of conventional armed forces and armaments in strengthening peace and maintaining strategic stability. An essential characteristic of the strategic stability mechanism is its multilateral nature, that is to say purposeful, coordinated action by all States and cooperation among them. Kazakhstan believes that the process of making radical reductions in conventional weapons must be both regional and global in nature and that, as it is achieved, it will constitute progress towards general and complete disarmament. General Assembly resolution 51/45 N noted the role of comprehensive arms control — particularly with regard to small arms and light weapons, confidence-building measures, the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, demining and conversion — as an important prerequisite for maintaining and consolidating peace and security and for effective rehabilitation and social and economic development.

In our view, transparency in the control and limitation of conventional weapons is a good basis for preventing a destabilizing build-up of armaments in any region of the world or an excessive concentration of weapons in any State. In this context, we greatly appreciate the work of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, and we hope that early agreement will be reached on guiding principles for a comprehensive and integrated approach to strengthening peace through practical measures in the field of disarmament.

Kazakhstan advocates the halting of the illicit traffic in arms. This problem is currently becoming increasingly acute. While not a primary cause of conflicts, arms deliveries feed them, as is apparent from almost all the conflicts currently under way. The destabilization of the situation in individual regions of the world demonstrates that control of conventional weapons and their distribution must be strengthened and serve as an important instrument for the maintenance of regional security. In this context, we support the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and regard it as an important component of such control. Since 1992 we have been regularly providing data to the Register, and we regard ensuring the broadest possible participation of States Members in the functioning of this important instrument as an urgent task.

An important item on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission is the question of convening the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. In our view, the documents of the Commission, which reflect some narrowing of the differences between the various positions of States, afford a good basis for constructive consideration of this agenda item during the present session. Certainly there are still a good number of issues that require in-depth discussion. However, we hope that the differences that have been reconciled and the efforts made by States to resolve the issues relating to the convening of the fourth special session will prevail over the remaining divergences of approach. I should like, with a good measure of optimism, to emphasize the importance of achieving consensus regarding the objectives and the agenda of the special session. We hope that it will yield positive results for progress in the field of disarmament, arms control and issues of peace and international security.

The delegation of Kazakhstan fully shares the view that the Disarmament Commission must continue to play its unique role in the machinery of disarmament in order to contribute to the ongoing process of achieving "sustainable disarmament". In our view, the working documents prepared for this session of the Commission provide a good basis for the ongoing discussion.

My delegation is prepared to work together with you, Mr. Chairman, and with the other delegations present in this room in the search for mutually acceptable solutions to the complex issues on the agenda for this session.

Mr. Khairat (Egypt): It gives me great pleasure to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission, and I would like to express my confidence that under your capable guidance the Commission will be able to successfully fulfil its mandate for this year. I would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their well-deserved election. Let me also take this opportunity to assure you and the Bureau of the utmost cooperation and support of my delegation during our deliberations.

Our task during the current session of the Disarmament Commission surely must be to work with determination to achieve consensus on the three items before the Commission, namely, the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV), establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, and "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N". Indeed, the importance of the work of the Disarmament Commission at this substantive session gains paramount significance as the three items on its agenda will be discussed for the last time.

General Assembly resolution 53/77 AA recommended that an item entitled "Fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament" be included for a fourth year in the agenda of the Commission at its 1999 session, with a view to promoting agreement on the objectives, agenda and timing of the session, thus allowing the General Assembly to decide, upon the recommendation of the Commission, on a date for convening the session.

The adoption of resolution 53/77 AA without a vote reflects and testifies vehemently to the overwhelming support for the indispensable need to convene SSOD IV, in order to address ways and means to promote disarmament principles, objectives, priorities, machinery and efforts for coping with the disarmament challenges in the new millennium.

Since the adoption of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD I) in 1978 the world has witnessed a number of developments that pose a ferocious challenge to the non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control agenda, most notably in the field of nuclear testing. Egypt therefore reiterates its unequivocal support for the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Our support is based on the need to reflect the fundamental changes in international relations that have taken place since the end

of the cold-war era and the crystallization of a new world order based on cooperation, not confrontation — changes that have provided a much more favourable and cohesive atmosphere for the pursuit of disarmament efforts.

We believe that SSOD I should constitute a model to be further followed in our preparations for SSOD IV. Particular reference should be made in this regard to the SSOD I Final Document, which states that

> "Priorities in disarmament negotiations shall be: nuclear weapons; other weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons; conventional weapons, including any which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects; and reduction of armed forces." *(resolution S-10/2, para. 45)*

This is what constitutes in our view the basic elements for the programme of action, which, if it is to be implemented, requires the positive will of all States, particularly of the nuclear-weapon States. We also believe that our endeavour in this regard should revolve around reaching an agreement on the timing of the special session and achieving general understanding on its agenda, which could be studied further by the preparatory committee of SSOD IV.

My delegation is pleased to see on the Disarmament Commission's agenda for the third year the item entitled "The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned". Given the vital topicality of this issue, we expect that the deliberations of the Disarmament Commission on nuclear-weapon-free zones during this item's third and last year will not be limited to formulating guidelines; they should result in formulating specific recommendations based on practical assessments of the established zones, in order to further enhance the concept and to promote the ongoing efforts to establish further nuclear-weapon-free zones, particularly in the Middle East.

Given the region's special characteristics, the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would greatly contribute to arresting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to strengthening the security of all States in the region. Consequently, the establishment of such a zone would be deemed an important confidence-building measure, contributing to the achievement of just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The resolution introduced by Egypt on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East — the subject of resolutions adopted annually by the General Assembly since 1974 and by consensus since 1980 — testifies to the overwhelming support for this objective. However, no concrete measures, no working meetings and no serious talks have yet been held, formally or informally, among regional parties with a view to implementing such a zone.

Moreover, the Cairo Declaration, adopted on the occasion of the signing ceremony of the Treaty on the African nuclear-weapon-free zone, emphasized that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, especially in regions of tension, such as the Middle East, enhances global and regional peace and security. This is vivid testimony by the African States of the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the Middle East still lags far behind. I am only stating the facts when I say that the existence in Israel — the only State in the region that has not acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and has not declared its intention to do so — of nuclear facilities that are not subject to full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and its operation of an ambiguous nuclear programme obviously cause alarm among States of the Middle East. Clearly, this odd situation has to be carefully addressed in the deliberations of the Working Group concerned and has to be reflected in any outcome, as it stands in clear defiance of the whole non-proliferation regime that we all aspire to safeguard and promote.

There is another item in our agenda that will be discussed for the third year. The importance attached to the agenda item entitled "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N" emanates from the continued importance we attach to conventional arms, in particular small arms and light weapons. This subject must be approached and tackled in a careful manner in order to avoid any duplication of work between the Disarmament Commission and the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms and light weapons established by the Secretary-General. We understand that practical disarmament measures addressed under this item should be applied in post-conflict situations for consolidation of peace by all concerned.

Yet it should be noted that this item touches on various aspects of the work of the United Nations as a whole, especially in transitional areas where peace has not been completely yet achieved. These are areas where no concrete definitions have yet been agreed. While there is room to draw from practical experiences and lessons learned from past and present United Nations peacekeeping missions, it would seem sensible to restrict our consideration of the matter to a pure disarmament scope and to stay away from other areas which are not within the competence of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative disarmament body and which are dealt with in other appropriate bodies.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we hope that the 1999 session of the Disarmament Commission will be a positive turning point, and we once again pledge our full cooperation to you and to the very able Chairmen of the Working Groups in order to achieve our desired results.

Mr. Pham Quang Vinh (Viet Nam): At the outset, my delegation would like to join others in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this important Commission. Our warmest congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau. May I assure all the officers of our delegation's cooperation in bringing our work to a fine conclusion.

This year's substantive session of the Commission is convened at a very complicated juncture of history. A century bloody and devastating wars is coming to an end. A new century and millennium are coming, while the world yet stands before a time of uncertainty and anxiety. The end of the cold war has brought about new opportunities for mankind to work for a safer and better world, as decades of hostility and rivalry between great Powers have been replaced by a period of reduced tension and enhanced cooperation.

Yet it seems that many of these opportunities are being lost. Wars and conflicts continue. In certain quarters of the globe, military alliances, which should have been of little use in view of the new circumstances after the cold war, have been further strengthened. This is not a welcome development and is one that demands greater efforts to advance the cause of disarmament.

The Disarmament Commission is a unique body of the United Nations system in that it conducts in-depth deliberations every year on the issues of disarmament and security and develops in a continuous process various sets of guidelines to promote global disarmament and thus contribute to the greater security of the world. At the turn of the millennium, the Commission will this year be considering all three items on its agenda in their final stage. Viet Nam attaches great importance to the annual work of the Commission. In view of the challenges as well as the opportunities before us, I am sure that greater efforts should be made by all parties in the spirit of cooperation and accommodation so that all of these issues on the agenda can be finalized.

Viet Nam is pleased that the item on the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV) has been extended for this session by consensus. We have stated on various occasions our strong support for the early convening of the special session. The overwhelming majority of Member States have also underlined the necessity of such a session. We have agreed with the approach that delegations to the Disarmament Commission should work to arrive at agreement on issues stipulated by resolution 53/77 AA, on the agenda and timing of SSOD IV. The actual preparations should be the work of the preparatory committee, which in our view should be initiated as soon as possible.

Viet Nam supports the initiative to convene the session as early as possible. We can certainly exchange further views on the objectives and agenda during the discussion in the Working Group. It is our hope that general agreement will be built and that the preparatory process will soon be able to begin so that delegations will have ample time to prepare for the session.

The special sessions of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament have made valuable contributions to the control of arms, to the advancement of the cause of disarmament and to the greater security of the world. It is high time for us to take stock of the developments of the past decades relating to the world's political and security environment and to work out steadfast measures to build a new and safer world.

Viet Nam supports a balanced agenda to facilitate disarmament efforts in both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. We believe, however, that priority should be given to nuclear disarmament. Apart from traditional issues in nuclear disarmament, other issues that may trigger a new arms race must also be dealt with, such as critical testing and designs to develop theatre missile-defence systems. Recent developments in the area of nuclear proliferation have further underlined this need. The end of the cold war has made it even more

obviously unjustifiable to maintain the nuclear stockpiles and other weapons of mass destruction. We believe that the best thing is to achieve a world free of all these weapons.

Lasting peace and security for all can be built only upon a premise of equality. It is clearly not fair or sustainable for a small number of States to maintain virtually absolute superiority while the majority of Member States have to live in insecurity and under the menace of annihilation. It is therefore imperative for the world community to adopt a new agenda for disarmament for the new century, particularly for nuclear disarmament. This should be the overall objective of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

With regard to the item entitled "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N", my delegation expects that the Commission will this year be able to finalize the guidelines and recommend them to the General Assembly. The discussion of this item has so far been fruitful and has been making progress.

Viet Nam shares the concerns of the international community over the build-up of conventional weapons beyond the legitimate defence needs of States in various parts of the world, particularly over the illicit trade of small and light arms. At the same time, we have to recognize the right of States to self-defence. Under these circumstances, it is our conviction that the issue of small arms should be addressed in a comprehensive manner. While the smuggling of all types of weapons should be banned, transparency with regard to the production and transfer of these weapons by major manufacturers should also be further enhanced. It is also necessary to underline that all nations are guaranteed the right to equip themselves for their legitimate defence, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and international legal norms. This integrated approach should apply to the forthcoming international conference on small arms.

From 1968 to 1995 — from the Treaty of Tlatelolco to the Treaty of Bangkok — four nuclear-weapon-free zones were established, covering a total of 114 countries. The fact that more and more States are becoming parties to the treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones attests to the conviction that such zones help promote disarmament, arms control and nuclear non-proliferation. Along these lines, Viet Nam has welcomed, among the new initiatives, that of Mongolia to introduce a single-State nuclear-free status, which was warmly endorsed by the General Assembly last fall; the efforts made by Belarus in sponsoring a draft resolution to prevent the further deployment of nuclear warheads in Central and Eastern Europe; and, in particular, the strong determination of the countries in Central Asia to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in this important geographical part of the world.

As regards the nuclear-weapon-free zone in South-East Asia, to which Viet Nam is a party, we join the calls made by several delegations that the nuclear-weapon States sign the Protocol of that Treaty as soon as possible and thereby contribute to the Treaty's effectiveness.

Viet Nam supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other parts of the world on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by countries of the regions concerned. We hope that many more countries will recognize the returns that such zones will yield with respect to their security and make greater efforts to enhance regional and global peace and security. We support the consolidation of the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones through the initiative on a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere.

The workload of our Commission is surely very heavy and seems insurmountable in certain areas. Yet we still believe that given the common aspiration for a better and more secure world, our work will have a fruitful outcome. Once again, on behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam to this session, I wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, and other delegations of our close cooperation.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The delegation of Mexico has the honour of speaking on behalf of the Rio Group countries during this general exchange of views at the 1999 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

We would like to extend our warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Commission. We are convinced that your extensive diplomatic experience and your vast knowledge of disarmament issues are a guarantee of the success of the Commission's work this year. We would like also to extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

We would like further to place on record our deep gratitude to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Sergei Martynov, for his

excellent manner in which he discharged his mandate as Chairman of the Commission in 1998. The Rio Group would like also to thank Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala for his important introductory statement during the early phase of our work.

In the Veracruz act of 19 March 1999, the Rio Group took a stand in favour of strengthening multilateral forums, and in particular the United Nations, on the basis of the purposes and principles enshrined in its Charter, in order to make a decisive contribution to the promotion of peace, security, cooperation and an international dialogue on development.

The members of the Rio Group will continue to promote accession to, ratification of and full compliance by all States of the international community with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; the Mendoza Accord on the Complete Prohibition of Chemical and Biological Weapons; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction; and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

At the hemisphere level, these commitments were reflected in the chapter on "Building Confidence and Security among States" of the Plan of Action of the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago on 18 and 19 April 1998.

The recent agreement reached between Ecuador and Peru in October 1998, with the active participation of the Guarantor Countries of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol, is a very meaningful event in our area. It demonstrates the will of those countries to work for peace, respect for international law and the development of their peoples.

Also noteworthy is the reactivation of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, headquartered in Lima, Peru. The Centre's potential contribution to peace and international security is an integral part of the existing regional confidence-building machinery. We appeal to like-minded States to recognize the usefulness of the Centre and lend their support to regional efforts towards this end by making voluntary contributions to funding the Centre's operation.

We believe that the three substantive items on the Commission's agenda, in keeping with what was agreed in General Assembly resolution 53/79 A, provide us with a new opportunity to achieve progress in the field of disarmament and to strengthen the multilateral machinery for disarmament.

As members are aware, the question of nuclear-weapon-free zone is of particular importance and relevance to the Rio Group countries, which support the Treaty of Tlatelolco and remain committed to bringing about its full entry into force. We reaffirm our deepest conviction that Latin America and the Caribbean is a nuclear-weapon-free zone and that it has a fundamental role to play in the promotion of instruments that control the possession, production and transfer of weapons of mass destruction, as reflected in the Veracruz act.

We believe that, as a result of the negotiations held over the past two years on guidelines for the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones, a strong start has been made in achieving the necessary consensus to bring this session of the Commission to a successful conclusion. We would like to place on record the Rio Group's great interest in the successful outcome of our deliberations on this topic. In this respect, the Chairman of the Working Group can count on our fullest cooperation.

I should now like to touch on the guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament. The members of the Rio Group share a commitment to promote disarmament by refining confidence- and security-building measures and by increasing the level of cooperation among our countries.

We are convinced that the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunitions, Explosives, and Other Related Materials is an important contribution of our hemisphere, and particularly of the Latin America and Caribbean countries, to the goal of preventing the illicit arms trade and to the promotion of disarmament. Along the same lines, it is worth highlighting that the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the Organization of American States recently concluded the negotiation of the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Arms Acquisitions, which marks a further substantive contribution to transparency and to the

strengthening of linkages among the countries of our hemisphere.

From this perspective, we feel that the Commission should conclude its consideration of the second substantive item on its agenda by adopting guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in post-conflict situations. We have no doubt that the adoption of such a document would contribute to increasing transparency and promoting confidence in this field. Our efforts will be directed towards this objective.

We wish to highlight that, through the Plan of Action of the Second Summit of the Americas, the Presidents of our region entrusted the Organization of American States, through its Committee on Hemispheric Security, with, *inter alia*, the task of analysing of the meaning, scope and future importance of international security concepts in our hemisphere in order to develop the most appropriate common approaches to enable us to cover all its diverse aspects, including disarmament and arms control.

With respect to the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the Rio Group feels that the consensus adoption of General Assembly resolution 53/77 AA has allowed the Disarmament Commission once again to place on its agenda the prospect of negotiations towards an agreement on the objectives and agenda of the fourth special session.

The members of the Rio Group believe that the conditions do exist for a substantive review of achievements on all disarmament topics, as well as for defining guidelines for the future, with special emphasis on multilateral organs and the role to be played by the United Nations in order to achieve the objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

The Rio Group offers you, Sir, the other members of the Bureau, and the Chairmen of the Working Groups its decisive support and fullest active and constructive participation throughout our deliberations.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): First of all, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your unanimous election and to pledge my delegation's full cooperation and support. I also extend my delegation's felicitations to all other fellow members of the Bureau as well as to the Chairmen of the Working Groups. Taking this opportunity, I would like to join previous speakers in expressing the gratitude of this delegation to the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus for his leadership and contribution to the work of the last session.

The Mongolian delegation shares the view that there is a strong need to intensify the multilateral efforts to promote disarmament. My delegation, in this respect, believes that this session has an important role to play, especially in reaching agreements on all three topics on the Commission's agenda: the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the elaboration of the guidelines on conventional arms control and disarmament.

We believe that, bearing in mind the progress made at the Commission's last session and given political will, it will be possible to adopt concrete guidelines and recommendations on all the agenda items. In this respect, my delegation shares the view expressed yesterday by Ambassador Seibert of Germany that the future role of the Commission will depend on the success of our endeavours during this session.

Among the pressing issues which are on the agenda relating to weapons of mass destruction, my delegation underlines the urgent need for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); further strengthening the regime of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the conclusion of a universal and verifiable fissile materials cut-off treaty; as well as working out an effective verification regime for the Biological Weapons Convention.

Likewise, we believe that early ratification of START II by the Russian Duma and its entry into force would give an important political impetus to further nuclear arms reduction. This would not only lead to a considerable reduction of deployed strategic warheads on each side, but would also pave the way for the next phase: START III.

The NPT Review Conference, scheduled to be held next year, should mark an important event in the field of nuclear disarmament. In this regard, my delegation believes that every effort should be made to ensure adequate preparations, both in substance and procedure, for the Review Conference.

We believe that the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

is a pressing issue. Given the new environment created in the disarmament field since the previous special sessions, which reflects both positive and negative developments, the convening of the special session would be an appropriate international response to the new challenges that lie ahead, including in the field of nuclear disarmament. The special session must assess past performance and formulate a new vision and strategy for the further reduction and elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as the control, limitation, reduction or elimination of some categories of conventional weapons.

My delegation believes that, given the necessary political will and mindful that the Commission is not intended to substitute for the preparatory committee that might be established for the fourth special session — as you, Sir, pointed out yesterday in your statement — the Commission at this session could come to an agreement on the objectives and agenda, as required by General Assembly resolution 53/77 AA. This would pave the way for setting the date for convening the special session.

This session is expected to finalize the guidelines and recommendations on the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones. We believe that the draft working paper prepared by the Chairman of Working Group I, Ambassador Emilio Izquierdo of Ecuador, forms a good basis for finalizing those guidelines and recommendations and for their submission for adoption by the General Assembly later this year.

While on this subject, my delegation would like to briefly refer to General Assembly resolution 53/77 D, adopted last year, entitled "Mongolia's international security and nuclear-weapon-free status". By that resolution, the international community welcomed our nuclear-weapon-free status. This marked the first step towards the creation of that status. Though our case is seen mainly as an exceptional one, due to Mongolia's unique geographical location, it nevertheless represents a novel, creative approach to dealing with non-traditional cases. It also shows how the support and cooperation of neighbouring States is important.

It is our belief that in order to be well founded and tenable, the status, including the rights and obligations of the States concerned, needs to be clearly defined. In this respect, the rich experience gained from establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones will be most useful. In its turn, our experience could also be useful for some future non-traditional cases. With that in mind, my delegation is prepared to offer some ideas in Working Group I.

During the negotiations on this question, the parties concerned have come to an understanding that since nuclear-weapon-free status would form only a part of the national security of an individual State — in this case of Mongolia — the status would be more credible and stable if its overall security were ensured and internationally recognized. This, we believe, is also an innovative approach to security.

In implementing the resolution, my country would be cooperating primarily, but not solely, with its two immediate neighbours, China and Russia, as well as with other nuclear-weapon States. The consultations that have been held recently on the ways and means of implementing the resolution have clearly demonstrated the willingness of the parties concerned to work together in the spirit of the resolution. At the same time, we would like to point out that the support and cooperation of other Members, as envisaged in the resolution, are necessary and would be most welcome. The United Nations, especially the Department for Disarmament Affairs and its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, also has an important role to play, as underlined in the resolution.

My delegation also shares the legitimate concerns expressed by many States over the increase in the arms trade and the spread of conventional weapons, especially in areas of armed conflict. It is believed that the global trade in small arms and light weapons constitutes one third of the overall trade in conventional weapons, with the estimates of trade in light weapons reaching $10 billion a year. Moreover, since 1990, small arms and light weapons used in various armed conflicts have resulted in the deaths of more than 4 million people. The plight of 20 million refugees and 24 million displaced persons is also connected, directly or otherwise, with those armed conflicts.

Mongolia attaches great importance to the reduction and even the elimination of certain categories and types of conventional weapons. My delegation believes that the reduction in conventional armaments should be carried out bearing in mind the defence and security needs of States.

My delegation would like to note with satisfaction that with the entry into force of the anti-personnel landmines Convention this year, an important step has been made in conventional disarmament. The impact of concrete disarmament measures on development cannot be overemphasized.

In our view, it is logical that a further reduction in States' military budgets, and an increase in their transparency, would promote the confidence that is necessary for placing limitations on and reducing conventional arms. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms should be further strengthened.

We believe that the draft working paper prepared by the Chairman of Working Group III, Mr. Michael Hoey of Ireland, and distributed yesterday will enable the Commission to finalize the guidelines for conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament.

My delegation also believes that the convening in the year 2000 of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects would be a timely response to this crucial need.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): May I start by congratulating you warmly, Mr. Chairman, on your election to preside over the 1999 session of the Disarmament Commission. We are confident that under your wise and able leadership, this Commission will be successfully guided through its challenging agenda. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Martynov, as well as the Chairmen of the Working Groups, under whose guidance we managed to make considerable progress last year.

Turkey, like many other countries, is committed to the goal of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. This goal should be pursued with realism through a balanced approach encompassing steps relating to both nuclear and conventional arms. Success in disarmament and arms control initiatives depends primarily on the creation of a political atmosphere that inspires and generates confidence. To be effective, any disarmament or arms control measure must provide for undiminished security for the countries concerned without upsetting the global strategic balance. It must provide for adequate and appropriate verification. Greater transparency in defence issues is indispensable in order to avoid uncertainty, misunderstanding and insecurity. Thus, adequate verification and transparency are two fundamental principles in disarmament.

We share the view that this is a significant year for the Disarmament Commission. We believe that this year's conclusions will pave the way for the future work of the Commission.

With regard to nuclear-weapon-free zones, Turkey has traditionally supported the establishment of such zones wherever possible and practically feasible. As the establishment of such zones has a direct bearing on the security of States within those defined regions and on the existing military balance, the desire for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones should necessarily come from all the countries of the zone, and the principle of undiminished security should be strictly observed. In this respect, we welcome the efforts to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, which is moving forward with the unanimous support of the States of the region and the global community.

The statistical evidence indicates that small arms and light weapons are imposing heavy tolls on human life, security and sustainable development. As the Secretary-General stated in his most recent report on the work of the Organization, 90 per cent of those killed or wounded in conflicts involving light weapons are civilians.

At this juncture, we would like to state that the report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, transmitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in document A/52/298, constitutes an important and comprehensive contribution to the treatment of this subject. Although the connection between drug trafficking and the illicit trade in small arms, seen so often in regional conflicts, is mentioned in passing in the report, Turkey believes that, given its significance, this question should be dealt with more extensively. In addition, we are of the opinion that in the recommendations section of the report, it would have been beneficial to refer to the need to include small arms in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. We also support other initiatives concerning small arms and light weapons offering better perspectives for new and improved international cooperation.

As mentioned by Mr. Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, on the opening day of this session, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution 53/77 T, on illicit traffic in small arms. The resolution requested the Secretary- General to prepare a report on this issue, addressing the problem, providing possible solutions and identifying roles for the United Nations. We hope that the new report will take into consideration the concerns of many countries, including mine, on this crucial subject.

Since demining constitutes a practical disarmament measure in post-conflict situations, I would like to point out that Turkey is fully conscious of the human suffering and the casualties caused by the irresponsible and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. However, the security situation around Turkey is distinctly different from that which the proponents of the Ottawa process face. It is also a fact that mines are being used indiscriminately by terrorist organizations. These objective factors make it impossible at this stage for Turkey to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We are keeping an open mind, however, about an eventual ban to be achieved in stages. This approach would correspond to the evolutionary character of Turkey's policy on anti-personnel landmines. With the humanitarian aspects of this question in mind, we put into effect a national moratorium in January 1996, banning the sale and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. I am pleased to announce that, as a renewed expression of its determination to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the international community aimed at preventing the casualties caused by anti-personnel landmines, and of its commitment to the humanitarian objectives of the relevant international instruments in this field, Turkey has announced its decision to extend this moratorium for another three years following its expiry.

We are also developing a number of bilateral initiatives with some of our neighbours to establish regimes for keeping our common borders free of anti-personnel landmines and preventing their use in border areas in the future. To this end, we have already initiated contacts with Bulgaria and Georgia. On 22 March 1999, Turkey and Bulgaria signed an agreement to that effect.

We are of the view that disarmament and non-proliferation deserve a fresh and objective look in the light of the fundamentally changing international security environment. To that end, the international community must seek agreement on an up-to-date and realistic disarmament agenda for the next millennium. We support the proposal to convene a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. However, such a special session should provide us with a forward-looking and conducive atmosphere in the field of disarmament. We hope that, should the special session materialize, it will provide not another international forum where positions are entrenched but rather an environment conducive to the achievement of concrete results. We are encouraged that at the last two sessions of the General Assembly resolutions on a fourth special session devoted to disarmament have been adopted by consensus.

Turkey, fully aware of the status of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative, not a negotiating, body, hopes that this year's session will produce recommendations and guidelines that will serve as useful tools in the fields of both nuclear and conventional weapons.

As we have done in the past, my country is ready to participate in the deliberations of the Disarmament Commission in a constructive manner, with the goal of removing the seeds of instability and insecurity.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. Chairman, I wish on behalf of the Argentine delegation, and on my own account, warmly to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau, as well as the Chairmen of the Working Groups, on your having been elected to serve during the 1999 session of the Disarmament Commission.

I wish to make some brief comments — without prejudice to the statement made this morning by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group, with which my delegation associates itself.

As we approach the new millennium, there are still pending tasks in the areas of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. Unfortunately, we remain concerned at the continued risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in some regions, and at the illicit traffic in arms, because these pose a threat to the internal security of States and to regional and global stability. Yet we must not fail to acknowledge that over the past decade considerable, encouraging progress has been achieved on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. Here, Argentina considers that the international community must put rhetoric aside and combine, indeed increase, its efforts in order to continue the progress in this sphere.

The end of the cold war and the approach of a new millennium require that United Nations organs be adapted to the new circumstances. Because of its nature as a "pre-negotiating" body, the Disarmament Commission is a forum well suited to bringing about constructive progress in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. This year the Commission will conclude its consideration of the three substantive items on its agenda, the scope and complexity of which demand that we try to

be flexible. In this connection, we appreciate the working papers submitted by the Chairmen of two of the Working Groups, entitled respectively, "Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned" and "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N".

Without prejudice to the comments and contributions the Argentine delegation will make in the course of the work of those Working Groups, let me say that we consider that those two documents will contribute to the adoption of conclusions and recommendations on those agenda items. In that connection, my delegation will support members' efforts to agree on consensus documents that will embody the important recommendations that have been offered during prior substantive sessions.

Argentina considers that there are important international challenges before us, and that the agenda of the Commission reflects these. My delegation will cooperate with other delegations in focusing all of its efforts on helping this process to succeed.

Mr. González (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the Chair of our Commission for this year's substantive session.

The delegation of Chile considers that the Disarmament Commission has a special role to play as a deliberative organ of the multilateral disarmament machinery. The possibility of examining topics in depth — though, unfortunately, not always realized — along with the Commission's universal composition are its most important and characteristic elements.

We feel that this process of exchanging opinions should be supported by a constructive spirit and future-oriented vision so that a new agenda reflecting contemporary needs can be prepared. Our responsibility is precisely to find ways of continuing to made advances in this field, specifically in the context of that new agenda.

We would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the declaration made in Veracruz, Mexico, on 19 March this year, by which the Rio Group reaffirmed the need to strengthen multilateral forums, in particular the United Nations, and to contribute to the promotion of peace, security and cooperation, as well as of international dialogue on development.

Similarly, we welcome the reactivation of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development, headquartered in Lima, Peru. We believe that this Centre can, and undoubtedly will, make a contribution to peace and international security and will serve as a mechanism for promoting confidence in our region.

As regards the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, we would like to take this opportunity to confirm our support for the position of the Non-Aligned countries.

Chile believes it imperative that, with the contribution of all and with the necessary flexibility, we finally achieve the necessary consensus to give substantive content to the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the holding of which has already been approved in a series of resolutions adopted by the Assembly. In order to unblock the present impasse, which has been created by the lack of consensus on the session's agenda and the ensuing disagreement regarding the date for convening the session, we might consider the possibility of an informal group that would hold informal consultations to establish minimum terms of reference and thus give important momentum to the emergence of a consensual agenda, as Argentina proposed during the last session of the General Assembly.

On the other hand, the content will have to reflect the fundamental changes that have occurred on the international stage since the holding of the last special session, as well as the important progress achieved in the field of disarmament and other emerging topics.

We believe that the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will have to give particular attention to new proposals. This is why we have expressed our special wish that the session also take advantage of the participation and creative contributions of non-governmental organizations involved in disarmament.

Chile considers that nuclear-weapon-free zones, along with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, are the cornerstones of the non-proliferation regime. Therefore, they constitute an important step towards well-being and progress for humanity. We believe in the need to consolidate the objectives of the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, and we would like to

see continued progress along the route laid out by Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok.

The fact that the international community has recognized the emergence of a southern hemisphere and adjacent areas free from nuclear weapons is a very important development, since this recognition takes into account the legitimate concerns of non-nuclear-weapon States occupying more than half of the surface of the earth.

In this context, and in view of the risks involved, we believe it is essential to emphasize the need to adopt measures to regulate international shipping of radioactive wastes and spent nuclear fuel in accordance with the highest international security standards. We therefore support every initiative to strengthen such standards and any others that may be relevant in the context of the competent international organs. We invite States that ship radioactive materials to provide expeditiously, to countries that may be affected and that so request, the required guarantees that their regulations are in line with International Atomic Energy Agency transport regulations, as well as to provide the relevant information relating to the shipping of radioactive materials.

Ultimately we hope that the idea of transforming most of the Earth into a nuclear-weapon-free zone will have an important effect as an example and will thus strengthen the process of nuclear disarmament as well as the consolidation of the non-proliferation regime.

Our delegation also attaches particular importance to conventional disarmament and arms control. We would like to highlight the fact that Chile is in favour of greater transparency in this field and thus for some time has made its defence policy explicit.

At the regional level we have promoted a process of confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy with the aim of defining a new concept of sustainable international security that is forward-looking and that deals with non-conventional threats, which form part of the humanitarian agenda that is making headway at the United Nations. We are also party to the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. Similarly, within the context of the Plan of Action of the second Summit of the Americas held in Santiago, Chile, in April 1998, we contributed to the advancement of the idea of entrusting the Organization of American States' Committee on Hemispheric Security with the task of carrying out an analysis of the scope of security concepts and developing common approaches to deal with disarmament and arms control.

We also support the initiative of the group of interested countries, led by Germany, that is promoting concrete disarmament measures to bring about the consolidation of peace in processes in which the United Nations is participating. In this regard, we feel that the Disarmament Commission should conclude the adoption of guidelines in this field, giving particular attention to the consolidation of peace in post-conflict situations.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm our willingness to cooperate so that the Commission will achieve concrete results. We believe that this is the best way to strengthen it and increase its international legitimacy.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) *(spoke in French)*: Allow me first of all to reiterate to you my warm congratulations, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. I have no doubt that your great skill and experience will enable you to carry out the responsibilities of your office in an outstanding way. You can count on the full support of the delegation of Mali.

I would also like to express my delegation's appreciation for the remarkable work carried out by your predecessor and for the important contribution made at the previous session by the Chairmen of the three Working Groups.

Finally, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, for the enlightening statement he made yesterday.

Some twenty years after it was created, the Disarmament Commission is at a crossroads. Its relevance and contribution to the work of disarmament and to strengthening international peace and security no longer need to be proved. My delegation believes that in order to preserve its *raison d'être* and credibility the Commission must succeed in adopting during this session useful and concrete recommendations on the three items on its agenda.

In this regard, I would like to underline the particular importance that Mali attaches to the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. This is why my country has already ratified the Pelindaba Treaty, as it is convinced that extending nuclear-weapon-free zones to all the regions of the world

will be a significant contribution to international peace and security.

Concerning the agenda item on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, I would like to reiterate the support of my country, Mali, for the holding of such a session. On the eve of a new era, it is important for the international community to take stock of the international security and disarmament situation in order to equip itself with an appropriate plan of action. Mali hopes that this question will be debated in a spirit of consensus in order to bring about a positive conclusion, as is recommended by General Assembly resolution 53/77 AA. In this connection, my delegation supports the working paper drafted by the Chairman of the Working Group on this item, which he presented at the previous session.

The third item on our agenda has to do with guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N. Mali's position on this item is based upon national and international initiatives. My country believes that the maintenance of arsenals exceeding the needs of national defence and security represents a threat to national, regional and international peace. This is why my delegation wishes to underline the importance of measures aimed at stopping the illicit flow of arms, in particular the traffic in light weapons and small arms.

In this connection, I would like to draw the Commission's attention to some initiatives undertaken by my country, Mali. In 1994, the President of the Republic of Mali, Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, asked for and obtained special assistance from the Secretary-General of the United Nations in order to study ways and means of curbing the proliferation of small arms in the Saharo-Sahelian subregion. This initiative, which received a resounding reception as a result of the spectacular destruction of thousands of arms in Timbuktu two years ago, has since 1994 resulted in the introduction of draft resolutions entitled "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them".

Also on Mali's initiative, the conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted at Abuja on 31 October 1998 the Declaration of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa. This constitutes a significant advance in the fight against the stockpiling, proliferation and excessive use of light weapons and small arms. The moratorium, which came into force on 1 November 1998, covers hand-held weapons, landmines, grenades, portable rocket launchers and mortars, as well as the ammunition for those weapons.

This initiative by Mali, which received a favourable response in April 1998 at Oslo and in October 1998 at Brussels, has led to an integrated security and development project called the Programme of Coordination and Assistance on Security and Development (PCASED). A meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of ECOWAS countries, jointly organized by the Secretariat of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, was held in Bamako, Mali, from 24 to 25 March 1999 in order to define the modalities of implementing the Programme.

The action plan adopted at that meeting outlines nine priority areas of activities for the States members of ECOWAS: the development of a culture of peace; the formation of security forces and armed forces; the strengthening of controls at ports, airports and borders; the creation of a data bank and a regional register of light weapons; the collection and destruction of surplus weapons acquired without authorization; the facilitation of dialogue with the manufacturers and suppliers, including, particularly, through the Wassenaar Arrangement; the revision and harmonization of national legislation and procedures; the mobilization of resources to achieve the objectives of PCASED; the broadening of adherence to the moratorium; and, finally, the reinforcement of cooperation with organizations in civil society. These measures eloquently reflect the determination of the 16 ECOWAS States to prevent the stockpiling, proliferation and excessive use of light weapons and small arms in their subregion, with a view to creating a propitious area for economic and social development.

My delegation believes that these efforts on the part of ECOWAS countries deserve to be supported by the international community as a way of achieving greater overall cooperation and coordination in order to stem the proliferation of light weapons and small arms and attenuate their devastating effects.

This session of the Commission is being held at a time when the question of disarmament is arousing particular interest throughout the world. We must take

full advantage of this situation to advance the disarmament programme on all levels, from weapons of mass destruction to light weapons and small arms.

The rationalization of the work of the Commission is a burning necessity. In this respect, my delegation agrees with the proposal presented by the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole at the last session.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to this important post. My delegation is convinced that your diplomatic skills, your knowledge in the area of disarmament and international security and your skilful leadership will ensure that the Disarmament Commission will successfully discharge the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Let me also congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election and Mr. Martynov on his skilful guidance of the work of the Commission during the 1998 substantive session.

The 1999 substantive session of the Commission is being held in an atmosphere of heightened understanding by the international community of disarmament issues. This year is a crucial one for us all, and the current session of the Commission is very significant, if only because it is one of the last sessions to be held during this millennium. In this respect, in order to move into the next century with dignity, we must do everything in our power to achieve the lofty goals we have set.

Indeed, on the eve of the twenty-first century, when the international community is faced with the task of resolving numerous global problems that pose serious threats to international peace and security, we must renew our efforts aimed at consolidating the results achieved to date and at making further progress in the field of disarmament.

In recent years the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones has become an established item on the international disarmament agenda. It is widely recognized that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in various regions of the world is an integral part of the mechanism for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and promotes the strengthening of international and regional peace and security.

This issue is of particular significance if one bears in mind that nuclear-weapon-free zones currently cover more than half of the earth's surface and that more than 100 States participate in such zones. Their significance in strengthening global and regional peace and security has also been recognized in many international documents, including the Final Document of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the report of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the States parties to the NPT; and also on the agenda of this important session of the Disarmament Commission. This question will undoubtedly be considered to be one of the fundamental issues facing the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

The Republic of Uzbekistan has consistently been working to ensure peace and strengthen regional security. We would like to note, among the measures it has taken, its proposal to declare Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Considerable progress has been made in the implementation of this proposal.

In the period that has elapsed since the last session of the Conference on Disarmament, intensive and substantive consultations have been held by a group of experts of the Central Asian States, together with representatives of international organizations, on the subject of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. Experts from nuclear-weapon States also attended some of those meetings. Those discussions have made it possible to move closer to agreement on all aspects of the fundamental elements of a treaty on the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

The most recent series of meetings was held at the beginning of February of this year in the city of Tashkent. In the course of those meetings, the experts held intensive and highly productive discussions with a view to reaching agreement on many of the provisions of a treaty for the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, the draft of which had been prepared on the basis of the results of previous meetings of the group of experts.

In order to make further progress in this area, the representatives of our States agreed to continue consultations among the States of Central Asia and also to maintain dialogue with experts from nuclear-weapon States. As part of this process, the next meeting will be held at the end of this month in Geneva, from 27 to 30 April.

In order to achieve the goal of creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, we must at the

international level devise a reliable system for the collective efforts of the States parties to the Central Asian initiative, which would include non-proliferation measures, environmental safety measures with respect to nuclear raw materials, and the prevention of the outflow of nuclear technology and materials.

I should like in this respect to note with satisfaction General Assembly 53/77 A, adopted by consensus. In that resolution, the General Assembly — convinced that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones can contribute to the achievement of general and complete disarmament, and considering that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, on the basis of agreements freely arrived at among the States within the region and taking into account the special characteristics of the region, can enhance the security of the States involved and strengthen global and regional security and peace — called on all States to support the initiative aimed at the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. The Assembly also deeply appreciated the concrete steps taken by the States of the region in order practically to realize that initiative.

On this subject I should like in particular to thank the representative of the Secretary-General for disarmament, Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala, and his department, as well as the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, for the support that they have provided in elaborating the basic elements of a future treaty on the Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone.

I should like also to take this opportunity to thank all the delegations that have spoken here whose statements included warm words of support for our initiative to create that nuclear-weapon-free zone.

We note that in recent years there have been significant achievements in the disarmament process. The agreement on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions and other international instruments attest to this.

Uzbekistan was among the first 10 States to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). This reveals not only our deep understanding of the importance of the Treaty, but also our desire to make a genuine contribution to the solution of the problem of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to an improvement of the planet's environmental conditional, to an increase in global security and to regional stability.

In the field of nuclear non-proliferation, Uzbekistan Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. The agreement between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the International Atomic Energy Agency on safeguards in the context of the NPT was confirmed by our signing of the Additional Protocol in 1998.

Uzbekistan welcomes the idea of convening a conference of States parties to the CTBT and, on the basis of its principled position in favour of strengthening the non-proliferation regime, calls for the rapid entry into force of that Treaty. In our opinion, such a conference would present a valuable opportunity to develop the most effective measures to achieve speedy ratification of the Treaty and could become a cornerstone in advancing a number of global and regional initiatives; the successful convening of the 2000 Review and Extension of the NPT; and a consolidation of the international community's efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime on the threshold of the next millennium.

In Uzbekistan, we believe that the question of the CTBT's entry into force is of the utmost importance to the global situation in today's political realities. The strengthening of the non-proliferation regime for weapons of mass destruction and the limitation of the group of countries possessing nuclear weapons is a priority of our foreign policy in the area of international security.

The Republic of Uzbekistan, as an initiator of the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, feels a responsibility to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and is prepared to take active part in the process of achieving further progress in the field of disarmament.

In conclusion, I assure you, Sir, of the full support and close cooperation of my delegation in your efforts to achieve successful results at this session of the Disarmament Commission.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.